Discourse of Fear and Economic Crisis: A Multimodal Analysis of Pakistani Newspaper's Political Cartoons of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates COVID-19 language of fear and phobia in Pakistani newspaper's political cartoons. These cartoons are a powerful medium for visual communication of any current and significant scenario as one image depicts the whole story. The editorial cartoons are also used to convey a specific meaning behind visual features. The present study is mainly concerned with the coronavirus, which affected life all over the world, and it is observed how newspapers are reporting this pandemic through political cartoons. Data is collected from 'The Dawn' newspaper. The research is qualitative. Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis is adapted for data analysis. Images denote and connote to convey a specific meaning according to the social and historical contexts. The study reveals that these political cartoons disseminate fear and mental illness among the people. However, they are also mocking and criticizing the official authorities for the economic crisis by highlighting the financial problems of the masses, as they did not make the wise decisions on time to control this pandemic.

Keywords: Language of fear, political cartoons, multimodal analysis, economic crisis, visual features, social semiotics

Introduction

Covid-19 affected every component of existence worldwide, whether it is personal relationships to international collaborations or industrial regulations to institutional operations. As societies attempt to protect themselves via stringent regulations on human movement and interactions, the disease keeps on decimating households, upend governments, weigh down economies, and tear through the social zone. The interconnectedness—and vulnerabilities—of the complex systems that make the current international scenario has never been extra apparent.

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The former US ambassador to NATO, Nicholas Burns, illustrated the impact of coronavirus to be potential "as severe as a WORLD WAR." Under such circumstances, it is very pertinent to trace the impacts, social and electronic media exercise upon the people's intellect and behavior. It is undeniable that many questions are now being raised like how needs to the social area respond to the evolving disaster? How will nonprofit foundations, philanthropic agencies, and social justice advocates emerge from the pandemic? What specific insights and competencies can civil society bring to endure the issues the world community now faces? How will agencies control potentially calamitous demanding situations to funding their operations? Moreover, the most important is how social media and newspapers represent and structure the meaning of the Corona Virus disease crisis. It is a newly emerging area of research for the interest of multidisciplinary researchers.

Print and electronic media, including social networking media throughout the globe, have been experiencing the same magnitude of spreading awareness and information along with the outbreak of widespread Novel Corona Virus Disease-19 (COVID-19). The fear and destruction caused by the disease since early December 2019 in most of the world countries built up a lens of uncertainty, chaos, and social disorder through which the journalists, economists, politicians, and the intellectuals are viewing the world and continuously constructing a picture of the communities during and post-corona virus world crisis. Newspapers portrayed a kind of chaotic discourse in COVID-19 affected countries. In many ways, the world was built on the conversation of fear through millions of articles published in large-circulation newspapers. Journalists reported stories on day-to-day life, politics, economy, sports, showbiz, health, and so on through the lens of COVID-19 (Rafi, 2020). "The digital media has revolutionized the way of communication. It has invented ways to convey paralinguistic features such as emotions, gestures, tone, stress, etc." (Kalsoom & Kalsoom, 2019: 127).

El Refaie (2009) claims that political nature cartoons usually have a distinctive style and genre that always play a communicative role in a given society. Political cartoons are the characteristic feature of newspapers and editorial pages in magazines. Different political figures and officials are represented subjectively, and a particular ideology is portrayed and conveyed silently. DeSousa and Medhurst (1982: 84) describe political cartoons as a "Neglected political communication genre."Templin (1999) argued that political images and cartoons distort and misrepresent reality with humor and satire to gain explicit goals. In such cartoons, diverse stereotypical ideologies are represented, which can be racist sexist. Hoff (1973: 1) stated political cartoons: "Sketchy pictures or caricature intended to affect public opinion." Edward (1997) suggested that such media play a vital role in making personalities positive or negative because characters are the central part of these cartoons. Various political and officials are portrayed through these images and cartoons in a scornful form to deform their character.

Moreover, advertisements, newspaper images, and cartoons are now strongly considered the essential tools for representing and disseminating information and the picture of the current social, economic, and behavioral patterns through print images or visuals with verbal and nonverbal features to construct meanings. A great deal of research has long been conducted on

advertising and fashion to explore the language and patterns in which they are constructed to convey meanings. Nevertheless, much recent attention is shifted to the meaning formation about the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the world generally and in Asiatic countries specifically.

This paper first presents the concept of *Social Semiotics* devised by Hodge and Kress (1988) as an approach of multimodal analysis in studies, particularly newspaper images, as a significant source of interpretations. A brief overview of multimodal analysis adopted as the analytical framework in this study is provided. Secondly, researchers have explained the sample chosen for the analysis and the analytical tool applied, which is the grammar of visual design given by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). Then, analysis of the four sample print images taken from a local Pakistani English Daily newspaper is done by examining what kind of language, verbal or nonverbal is used in those images to portray coronavirus affected situation of society and how this language is visually handled to promote fear, anxiety or the real facts. Furthermore, finally, the paper comes to its conclusion.

Machin and Mayr (2012:18) state: "Language shapes and maintains a society's ideals and values; it can also serve to create and legitimize certain kind of social practice." A language is a gadget that helps people to exist in this world. It is a communicative tool to get people connected to the universe as it reduces the gap between people's minds. A single utterance is loaded with implicit and explicit meaning. Language may be simple, but it is not a simple game of words for political leaders. Simple utterances of leaders have deep down hidden ideologies explored and analyzed applying different theories of discourse analysis. A single statement can be analyzed in different ways. Critical discourse analysis has a significant role in analyzing political discourse as it understands the hidden meanings of an utterance. It provides maximum possibilities of any occurrence as it involves an association between the structure of a text and its social function (Fairclough, 1993).

According to Anjum and Javed (2019: 4) "Language is a social phenomenon to interpret what is being said. In the Ideational function of language, transitivity analysis is quite advantageous to understand the experiential meanings of the text coherently."

Batstone (1995) summarized CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) as under:

> "Critical Discourse Analysts seek to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly; because they are covert, they are elusive of direct challenge, facilitating" what Kress calls the "retreat into mystification and impersonality". (Batstone 1995: 198-199)

CDA helps us analyze socio-political discourse and guides us to find out the speaker's background intentions behind specific word selection. The element which differentiates CDA from other discourse analysis lies in its quality of being 'critical' which shows the hidden connections and causes behind a discourse. It works to expose hidden ideologies behind the text, which are not evident to ordinary people (Fairclough, 1992).

Chandler (2007: 1-2) states: "Semiotics is the study of sign and it is not only the study of visual signs, but it includes words, sounds and body language". It is also quoted that "Semiology

as science is related to the word semiosis, a term used in semiotics to designate the production and interpretation of a sign" (Busmann, 2006).

Ferdinand de Saussure, a renowned Swiss linguist, broke new ground in the field of semiotic analysis. He was primarily concerned with how meaning is produced, holding it to be structured like a language. Saussure believes that a signifying system is formulated by a series of signs examined and analyzed in terms of their constituent parts, which he labeled as signifier and the signified. According to Saussure, the signifier is the form or medium of signs, for example, an image, a sound, or marks that construct a word on the page. By contrast, the signified is understood as concepts and meanings broadly familiar to all users of the same culture who share the same language (Fiske, 1990).

Thus, an image is concerned with the ideological factors and aesthetics commonly opened to readings and relative interpretations at the connotative level to explore how meaning is constructed through the complex semiotic interaction. Similarly, in media studies, semiotics uses a wide variety of discourse, including images, advertisements, and films, to enrich the participants with the knowledge they require to have the ability to analyze, evaluate and produce meaningful texts and designs in the future (Bouzida, 2014). With this perspective, Barthes (1968) possibly advocated the death of the author or creator of the text to observe the birth of the recipient, which allowed him to interpret, read and produce a wide variety of meanings which are a kind or form of semiotic production that is centered to observation and analysis of media discourse and messages to unleash the senses of the semiological researchers to the complexities of semiotic interpretation and new ways of using signs within the social and cultural contexts in media.

Machin (2007: 45) states: "Images are often subtly, or not so subtly, composed or changed to conceal or enhance certain elements…Images can be naturalistic in that they simply record what is out there in the world." Further, Kress and Leeuwen (1996) explained two kinds of 'offer' and 'demand image'. In 'offer' image, participants of a picture have no direct gaze towards viewers and offer them to interpret on their own and do not demand anything. While in the 'demand image', participants have direct interaction with their viewers and demand to interpret and make a friendly relationship. Both offer and demand images are evaluated according to social and cultural contexts.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been raised to be answered in the study:

- How does COVID-19 language depicted in Pakistani newspapers' political cartoons portray and disseminate the discourse of fear and economic crisis?
- What are the visual features used to explain economic crisis and fear in Pakistani newspaper's political cartoons?

Research Design

Nunan (1992) explains that qualitative research gives an in-depth knowledge of subjects, and it also explores the new dimensions in research. This research is qualitative, and different linguistic and visual features of political cartoons are analyzed by following Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis.

Data Collection and Sampling Procedure

The corpus of this study is the political cartoons related to COVID-19. Keeping in view the mainstream media discourse, data is purposively selected from a Pakistani English newspaper 'The Dawn' from 1st May 2020 to 15th May 2020. The Researchers used a purposive sampling technique in selecting the cartoons portraying the national and international picture of the crisis as a variety of visual cues can be observed in the depiction of fear and economic crisis and further delimited the data to those cartoons which depict discourse of fear and economic crisis during this period when the coronavirus cases were on peak in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

According to Machin (2007), every image connotes and denotes at the same time. Denotation is a dictionary or literal meaning, and it only gives the surface meaning, while connotation gives a deeper meaning, and it is according to social, historical, and cultural background. Any image is analyzed in a multimodal analysis while observing some elements: participants, size, gaze, settings, objects, and pose. In any image, any individual or participant is observed by their style, character and behavior, and these individuals also denote and connote according to their gestures towards the audience. Objects in images have connotative meanings mostly, and implicitly they depict a more profound meaning than the surface meaning. They have mostly implicit meanings, and they present a specific context surrounded by a participant or individual. The setting of an image also plays a vital role in describing specific time, occasion, or symbolizing a thought or idea. Settings in pictures are mostly typical than narrative. Cartoonists or photographers can represent their point of view or ideology through a specific setting. Poses describe the type of people and their living styles and values. There are different pose styles like controlled, less controlled, rigid, and soft, which explain an individual character and his beliefs. The large, medium and small size of participant and objects are also observed as it represents the important or less important things according to contextual meaning. Bold and small letters in pictures or images are also evaluated according to their font size. These letters and words implicitly or explicitly explain the most important or less important event. The participant's interaction angle is analyzed to see whether it is upward, downward, or in a vertical angle. Machin explained two types of gaze in pictures; one is offer, and the other is demand. In the offer image, participants have no direct gaze towards the viewers and do not make any friendly relationship. While in the demanding image, participants have a direct gaze towards the viewers and make a friendly and

confident relationship with them. Both offer and demand images are explained according to their specific social and historical contexts.

Results and Discussion

In recent studies, Rafi (2020) suggested that newspapers recognized tension and despair amongst children and older human beings who have been the most susceptible. Humans had been getting psychologically busted while being in isolation. Unluckily, there had been reviews of growing divorce rates and domestic violence. The same method to defend human beings from the virus turned into perversely impacting patients of home violence. Ironically, millions of these who have been both homeless and living in severe poverty, retaining off streets, have become almost impossible for them.
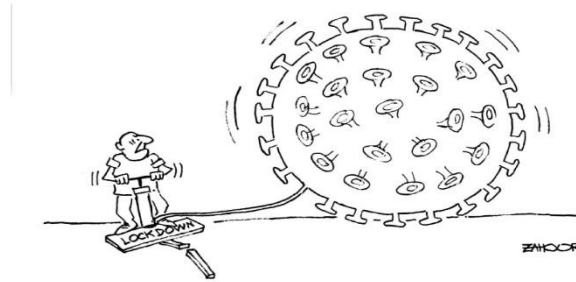

Figure 1. Taken from the daily 'Dawn' Dated: 01-05-2020

In figure 1, a middle-aged man in the center of the image gives meaning to the things in his surroundings. The image not only represents its subject but also portrays the current scenario. In the image, a middle-aged worker/labor is positioned in the center wearing worn-out clothes; tools (shovel and pickaxe) are shown to his left side that the source of his income and coronavirus is surrounding the labor. Middle-aged labor is a single participant in the image and is positioned close to the viewers. The worker's angle of interaction is downward, and it shows that this is the offer gaze. Machin (2007) explains that the offer image does not interact directly with the viewers, and it shows less confidence and hopelessness and non-friendly behavior. The downward gaze of the worker depicts his miserable situation in the current moment, which is due to the coronavirus as he is not getting any work. Through this striking image and a middle-aged single participant positioned in the center represents that the cartoonist wants to draw the viewers' attention to convey the alarming situation for the working class and a considerable fear of further raising the unemployment level for the government to realize the magnitude of current economic crisis.

The labor in the image wearing tattered clothes, barefooted, unshaven and unkempt hairs, and all of such depictions convey the general masses' fear due to the uncertainty regarding the reopening of work and further employment. He looks sad and depressed as he is unable to earn a living because of the pandemic. Particular Objects are taken for granted, and they connote

implicit and explicit meanings (Machin, 2007). In this image, fourteen COVID-19 virus structures are drawn by cartoonists who are implicitly portrayed as a binding machine destroying everything and causing destruction, especially for the poor. The words "MAY DAY" are written in capital bold letters, making it more appealing to have relevance to the celebration of World Labor Day, yet the distressed labor is looking for work to make his living, but because of the pandemic, he is unable to do so.

Figure 2. Taken from the daily 'Dawn' Dated: 06-05-2020

In figure 2, we see a single participant involved in the material process of pumping into corona. The person in the image is a middle-aged man holding an air pump and is engaged in an action pose. The man is pumping into Corona and has an anxious look on his face. The size of a man is smaller in front of the giant corona balloon. In a visual analysis, the large or small size of participants and objects portray a significant meaning (Machin, 2007). The large size of coronavirus explains that it is the most important issue in the current scenario as it is causing massive flattening everywhere. Another striking thing in the image is the broken foot pump on which the words "LOCKDOWN" are written in capital letters. The man is standing on the foot pump with a worrisome look on his face as if trying to figure out how to control this massive spread of Corona, increasing day by day and causing destruction for the whole world as it causes socio-economic downfall.

The participant's facial expressions, behavior, character, and body posture also connotes his specific background (Machin, 2007). In this image, the middle-aged man seems tired, and his posture is not straight, which explains his failure to stop the coronavirus. The extra-large size of coronavirus denotes its significant and vulnerable effects on people, and it seems that it is going to explode like a bomb. The participant's gaze is towards the coronavirus, and it is not making any interaction with the viewers, which explains its vulnerable situation.

The severity of the pandemic and its spread is ironically described in the image. The middle-aged man is on the one hand is airing into Corona and increasing its size while, on the other hand, he looks anxious and worried about its massive spread, but he is the cause of that as not following the precautionary measures against Covid-19. Therefore, it can be presumed that the cartoonist wants to alarm the general masses of the severity of ignoring lockdown instructions and the consequences of this unfortunate situation. (See figure 2)

Figure 3. Taken from the daily 'Dawn' Dated: 10-05-2020

In figure 3, two participants are fighting. Both participants are middle-aged men involved in arm wrestling. "SINDH GOVT" is written on the shirt of the right participant, and "FEDERAL GOVT" is written on the shirt of the left participant. Coronavirus is shown over their heads in a cartoonish image with big Dracula teeth and looking down at both participants with a potential monstrous smile suggesting mocking and ridicule.

In this image, there are three participants. Two are government representatives, and one is the coronavirus, which is also depicted as a living thing in this picture, and it seems that it is more powerful and dangerous than both of them. Both participants seem furious and have arm wrestling on a table, but no one wins in their battle even by taking different decisions against COVID-19. Corona Virus is portrayed as Dracula with his sharp and long teeth. It has a meaningful mocking smile on his face and an eagle eye on both participants. In this picture, there is an offer gaze as no one has a direct gaze towards audiences. Both individuals have a horizontal angle of interaction, while the coronavirus vivid eyes have a vertical angle on both participants. The gaze of the coronavirus shows cunningness and boldness while the horizontal gaze of both individuals describes that they are less confident and not having a clear vision of their surroundings, which shows them foolish and ignorant in the current situation. Specific posture style connotes different types of individuals according to their social roles (Machin, 2007). Conclusion: there is rigidness in both participants' posture, which shows their power and stubborn nature.

As corona cases have increased in Pakistan, the federal government and the Sindh government are in a constant cold war. A tug-of-war situation is created between both the center and the provincial government about the pandemic. Both governments are criticizing and blaming each other for the spread of the pandemic. They are neglecting each other efforts due to which a war-like situation is created between the federal and Sindh government. When both parties are busy criticizing and fighting each other, COVID-19 in the figure seems to be taking advantage of this situation by mocking and ridiculing them (see figure 3):

Figure 4. Taken from the daily 'Dawn' Dated: 15-05-2020

Two participants are depicted in figure 4. Participant in the center is the cartoon image of the Statue of Liberty with an image of coronavirus on its face and is looking forward to viewers. The participant on the left side, in the cartoon, is the portrayal of Donald Trump, president of the United States of America. He is not looking towards viewers and walking away, while the words "NOW FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY" are written over his head. Capital and bold words depict a significant crisis in the economy due to the coronavirus. The statue of liberty has a direct gaze towards the audience, and it demands its viewers to interact directly with him. According to Machin (2007), the participant having demand, the gaze is offering viewers to demand something, and it is bolder and confidant than offer images in which the participant does not have a direct gaze towards viewers. The posture of Donald Trump is at ease and not straight, and there is not any rigidness which describes his failure in achieving goals while the statue of liberty posture is straight and rigid, which depicts its success and confidence over the whole world in winning its mission of destruction.

The statue of liberty has a face of coronavirus and "COVID-19" is written on the tablet. The Statue of Liberty was a gift from the French people commemorating the alliance of France and the United States during the American Revolution, and after its dedication, the statue became an icon of freedom and the United States, seen as a symbol of welcome to immigrants arriving by sea. Here the statue of liberty depicts that it has locked the freedom with the fear of coronavirus, which is destruction to people of the USA and those who come to the USA as immigrants. President Donald Trump is wearing a formal dress, and an anxious and worried look appears on his face. The image of Corona on the face of the goddess of liberty represents its domination as America is going through hard times because of widespread Corona cases throughout the country and economic decline is evident. Meanwhile, the words "NOW FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY" over Donald Trump's head represent the current condition of America to recover from an economic crisis during a pandemic and a new motive and slogan for the next election campaign of Donald Trump. (See figure 4)

According to Machin and Mayr (2012), there is no neutral language, and it always connotes a specific meaning. Through these political cartoons, coronavirus is implicitly and explicitly depicted as a devil that is unable to be controlled, and it is causing fear, hopelessness, mental illness, health issues, and economic crisis. These editorial cartoons are also implicitly

criticizing the official authority's failure to bring up a responsible and wise decision to facilitate their people to come up with this COVID-19 plague.

Conclusion

The current research investigates how the language of political cartoons of COVID-19 represented in print media is creating, portraying, and spreading the fear of the general masses and the disasters of economic crisis throughout the world. Significant political cartoons are purposively selected and taken from Dawn newspaper for analysis from 1st May 2020 to 15th May 2020, when it has acute conditions in Pakistan and other countries. Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis is adapted for analyses of political cartoons. Different implicit and explicit visual features are depicted in political cartoons that explain the severe downfall of the economy, fear of coronavirus, and uncontrolled situation, causing uncertain situations for the current moment and the future. Political cartoons have a very different and unique style to convey a specific message to its audience with visual communication (El Refaie, 2009). Based on the discussion, findings reveal that COVID-19 is a significant threat to the national and international economy, and it is also causing a tense situation for both government and common people. Political cartoons of coronavirus reveal the current hype in the country between government officials and their failure to control this pandemic with decisions, and in the result, this is increasing day by day. Visual features of political cartoons also unveil uncontrollable crises in the economy, political and social destruction among government officials and the working class. Financial destruction hit the whole world, and even superpower United States is also suffering. Therefore, this study can also be extended by comparing discourse related to the coronavirus in Pakistani media and international media.

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